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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: MODERATE MUSLIM LEADER ACCUSES ARRAID
ORGANIZATION OF PROMOTING EXTREMISM

REF: 02 KIEV 4660

Classified By: Political Counselor Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Tensions are increasing within Ukraine's small Muslim population, with the head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in Ukraine (SDMU) Sheikh Tamin accusing the Muslim Association of Civic Organizations - Arraid of promoting Islamic extremism. Tamin, who is known for his moderate views and has spoken out publicly against extremism, criticized the GoU for not doing enough to support the SDMU and other moderate groups. In his view, this has unintentionally weakened the standing of moderate groups in Ukraine's Muslim community and strengthened better-funded extremist groups like Arraid. A recent visit to Arraid's center in Kyiv confirmed that the organization is well-funded and run by Muslims originally from the Middle East, and presents a carefully cultivated appearance of moderation. However, a local expert on Ukraine's Muslim community echoed Tamin's concerns about Arraid extremism, alleging that it is connected with the Muslim Brotherhood network and that it aspires to be Ukraine's leading Muslim organization. He added that several Muslim organizations, including Arraid, are competing for influence in Ukraine's largest Muslim community, the Crimean Tatars, but that thus far, extremists are making little headway. End Summary

Ukraine's Muslim Communities

¶2. (SBU) Some Muslim leaders claim that there are two million Muslims in Ukraine, but the government and independent think tanks estimate their number to be about 500,000. The majority of Ukrainian Muslims live on the Crimean peninsula and an estimated 50,000 live in Kyiv, mostly foreign-born. Ukraine's largest Muslim organization is the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Crimea (SDMC) with 332 registered communities. Its members are primarily Crimean Tatars, who were forcibly deported to Uzbekistan by Stalin in 1944 and were permitted to return to Ukraine in 1989. The SDMC's leader, Mufti Emirali Ablayev, is considered to hold moderate views on Islam. Ukraine's second largest Muslim organization, the SDMU, is led by Sheikh Akhmed Tamin and has 64 registered communities. It is based in Kyiv, it is a member of the inter-confessional All Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organization, and is known for its moderate views on Islam. A third organization, the Independent Spiritual Center of Muslims of Ukraine, has 19 registered communities located mostly in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in the East.

¶3. (SBU) Newcomer Arraid, registered in 1997 as a non-profit civic organization, has caused concern among the leaders of established religious organizations, both Muslim and Jewish. It currently has 14 regional branches and appears to be growing. According to its website, Arraid

founder Muazz Ubayda was refused entry into Ukraine in 2000 and reportedly now lives Yemen. Arraid represents mostly foreign-born Muslims; predominantly from Arab countries. It is widely believed to receive its funding from Arab sources, but Arraid members refused to confirm this when asked by an EmbOff during a 2002 meeting (reftel).

Egyptian Embassy Pressure and Arraid Support for Extremism

¶4. (SBU) SDMU leader Tamim is known as a moderate who has spoken out frequently against extremism, most recently at the ceremony marking the birth of the Prophet Mohammed in April, which was well attended by GoU officials and the diplomatic community. Tamim born in Lebanon in 1956, has been the SDMU's leader since its founding in 1993. Chief Rabbi Bleich of the Union of Jewish Organizations of Ukraine recently told EmbOff that he met frequently with Tamim and that he supported his opposition to Arraid.

¶5. (C) Sheikh Tamim, told EmbOff on May 11 that he was concerned by Arraid's proselytizing of extremist views and challenged by its generous foreign funding. Tamim said that recently Egypt's ambassador to Ukraine unofficially encouraged him to cooperate with Muslim extremists in Ukraine - presumably Arraid - and that the ambassador and his staff stopped attending services at Tamim's mosque after he refused. He added that they have been attending Arraid's mosque, which Tamim felt helped added legitimacy to Arraid's image.

¶6. (C) Tamim complained that well funded extremist groups like Arraid are better able to obtain property, construct mosques, and contribute to universities and student groups.

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He added that since he refused to accept money from extremist sources, the SDMU frequently makes little headway in efforts to obtain land for mosques and mentioned a dispute with the Kyiv city authorities over utility rates, which resulted in the temporary cut-off of heating. He said that the GoU's lack of support with property restitution claims and allocation of land for mosque construction weakened the SDMU's standing in the Muslim community, which unintentionally played into extremists' hands.

¶7. (C) Tamim provided EmbOff a booklet distributed by Arraid in Ukraine that included a passage encouraging material support - including weapons - for Muslims in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries. The booklet, "A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam" by I.A. Ibrahim, was printed in Egypt in 1997 in English and translated into Russian for distribution by Arraid.

Arraid's Carefully Cultivated Image of Moderation

¶8. (C) EmbOffs visited the Arraid office in February to follow up on Arraid participation in a USG-supported conference for Eastern European Muslim organization in November 2006, (Note: Given our concerns about the organization, at the time we recommended that no USG funding go to support their participation in the conference. End Note.) EmbOffs spoke with its Secretary General Mousa Arad, Vice President Mareii Bassil, and information coordinator Oleg Guzik who attended the conference. Guzik made only general comments about the conference and provided few details about what had been discussed. Bassil described the organization's outreach and charitable activities. He also mentioned problems with getting land from the government for the construction of more religious centers. None of the three were born in Ukraine but all were long-term Ukraine residents. Arad later mentioned that he had been born in Palestine.

¶9. (C) The Arraid center in Kyiv is located in a Soviet-era

recreation center that was thoroughly renovated and modernized. It has a large mosque, several class rooms for Islamic education, a cafe, auditorium, library, printing facility, and radio station. (Note: the Arraid Center was far more fully outfitted than the SDMU's center, confirming Tamim's complaints about Arraid's deep pockets. end note) The walls were decorated with posters promoting religious tolerance and mementos from a wide range of visitors to the center including the Ambassador of Kuwait, a parliamentary deputy, and representatives from orthodox churches. The Arraid center presented a carefully cultivated image of tolerance and moderation to its visitors.

Arraid Funded by Muslim Brotherhood

¶10. (C) In a subsequent meeting with the head of the Ukraine-based Institute for Middle East Studies, Alexander Bogomolov told Emboffs that Arraid is connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, an influential Islamic network founded in Egypt in 1927 that seeks to establish a unified caliphate covering the Middle East. It officially opposes violence directed against civilians, but some critics doubt its sincerity. The Muslim Brotherhood has sophisticated methods of finding charities world-wide, such as Arraid, and these charities frequently do not even know the origin of their funding. He said that Arraid's hierarchy is multi-layered, with its senior members involved in what he termed "clandestine" activities. Bogomolov mentioned that although Arraid portrayed itself as ethnically neutral, there have been previous power struggles between Syrians and Palestinians. He asserted that Arraid's goal is to have the leading role in Ukraine's Muslim community, but did not accuse the organization of violent or terrorist links. He added that several Muslim organizations, including Arraid, are competing for influence in Ukraine's largest Muslim community, the Crimean Tatars, but that thus far, extremists are making little headway.

¶11. (C) Comment: Tamim has previously raised his concerns to us about Arraid, but this is the first time he mentioned involvement by Egypt's ambassador and provided an example literature it distributed that mentioned providing weapons to Muslims. To be fair, there is only one passage referring to weapons in the 80-page booklet and there may be some truth to Arraid counter-statements implying that Tamim feels threatened by its growing influence. Bogomolov's expert credentials give credence to Arraid's ties to foreign funding, but he did not link it with extremist or terrorist activities in Ukraine. Although this could be nothing more than a struggle for dominance among local Muslim

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organizations, we take Tamim's concerns seriously. We will continue to seek ways to support those organizations that promote religious toleration and moderation, while monitoring Arraid's activities for signs of support for promoting extremism in Ukraine.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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